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SUBJECT: GVN Struggles to Enforce Internet Gaming Regulations

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Summary -----

¶1. (SBU) GVN regulations established to rein in online gaming by young people are for the most part ignored by both gamers and Internet cafe owners. The GVN's inability to adequately enforce its online gaming regulations reveals the broader challenges it faces in its attempts to manage the Internet and how Vietnamese citizens use the network. End Summary.

Vietnamese Gaming -----

¶2. (SBU) At present, Vietnam has nine online game providers that serve an estimated total of over two million players. The most popular game, a historical warfare game called "Vo Lam Truyen Ky," has around 250,000 players. Most online gamers are urban university and middle and high school students, some of whom cut class and stay out late to play online games. The National Assembly took up the issue in November 2005 when a number of legislators lamented the growing number of young people regularly playing online games and called on the Government to take action. Sensationalist articles in local newspapers have also highlighted cases in which juvenile delinquents go on murderous rampages or robbery sprees "because of their addiction to online games."

Attempts at Regulation -----

¶3. (SBU) The GVN's regulations on the management of online games came into effect on July 1, 2006. The joint responsibility of the Ministries of Culture and Information (MOCI), Posts and Telematics (MPT) and Public Security (MPS), the regulations are aimed at online game providers, Internet cafe owners and the gamers themselves. For example, online games providers have to meet a number of content and technical requirements and will receive a license only after being vetted by MOCI (content) and MPT and MPS (technical aspects).

¶4. (SBU) Internet cafe owners must now maintain records of all gamers (and, for that matter, other users) for 30 days, including their address, ID number and family information. They must also invest close to USD 2,500 for a special server that can monitor gamers' activities. The regulations also require that Internet cafes close at 11:00 p.m. and prohibits them from being within 200 meters of schools. Online game providers are also supposed to ensure that a gamer's virtual character will only be able to earn half the normal amount of points after three hours of play. After five hours of play, the player's bonus points will be zero. Finally, the regulations require that online players under the age of 14 be accompanied by an adult.

GVN Out of Quarters

15. (SBU) In an unscientific survey of gamers and Internet cafe owners, we found that most appeared to be ignoring the regulations. There were few if any restrictions on the age of gamers or the number of hours they played, and many cafes stay open past 11:00 p.m. (and in some cases operate 24/7). No cafes we visited required gamers to provide their personal information. According to a number of Internet caf owners, the USD 2,500 required for the new server is "just too much," and they get by with their old servers that lack the capacity to monitor users' behavior.

16. (SBU) GVN officials recognize there is a problem. A MOCI official in charge of censoring game content and granting licenses told us that the GVN could better and that her ministry, MPT and MPS need to coordinate better to ensure that both online game providers and Internet cafes are following the regulations. Striking a more pessimistic tone, an official from MPT's Informatics Department told us that the new regulations have not been properly and strictly implemented and "will likely end up nowhere."

Comment

17. (SBU) The GVN's inability to adequately enforce its online gaming regulations reveals the broader challenges it faces in its attempts to manage the Internet and how Vietnamese citizens use the network. No doubt Government enthusiasm for enforcing Internet-related regulations is greater when it comes to cracking down on use of the Internet to advance political and dissident causes. However, the case of online gaming is notable in that it shows that the web's continually evolving technology, combined with ambivalent Internet cafe owners and netizens, has created a situation in which the GVN's authority is regularly flaunted and its regulations are unenforced.
End Comment.

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